

PATENT APPLICATION
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**DIRECTION FINDING METHOD AND SYSTEM USING
PROBABILISTIC MAPPING**

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This application is filed within one year of, and claims priority to Provisional Application Serial Number 60/449,443, filed 2/24/2003.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to Emitter Locator Systems and, more specifically, to a Direction Finding Method and System Using Probabilistic Mapping.

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2. Description of Related Art

Emitter Location (EL) Systems are used to locate the position of emitting radio transmitters. Typically, once an EL System determines where (to the best of its ability) a transmitter is, this location is then plotted on a relevant map display for the operator. Other systems or modes sometimes only display the relative bearing from the receiver to the transmitter, where a radio Direction Finding (DF) System is employed. Unfortunately, real-world EL System measurements inherently have uncertainties due to several factors. Thus, the position of a transmitter on a display is only accurate to within a certain measurement error.

Some of today's EL systems display the error as a fixed offset shown on the screen using two lines to draw a "wedge" of a reading, say from 275 to 285 degrees. Other systems display the expected error on a separate indicator (as a number, or as a bar graph of varying height or length), and then the operator is expected to apply this expected error 5 to the reading. Yet another group of EL systems does not display the error at all. This leaves the EL System operator with an inherently imprecise location of the transmitter, and thus a decreased confidence and reliability in the position "fix."

The invention of this disclosure is a computer-executed display system and method that provides a far more useful, practical, and probabilistic method of presenting 10 measurement data to EL System operators than is presently done today. This is done by a unique display method and system that takes measurements, produces and displays "probability fields" related to where a transmitter is most likely to be located. The fields change interactively in real-time and are constantly updated as new measurements arrive. In addition, the method of this display system performs statistical calculations to further 15 enhance the accuracy of the probability presentations.

To understand how this invention provides a unique probabilistic display of an emitter's location, it is first important to understand the technique by which EL Systems are employed.

An EL System may be comprised of one or more radio Direction Finding (DF) 20 "Sets" which can either be fixed in location, or mobile on a vehicle, ship, aircraft, etc. The invention of this disclosure relates to EL Systems employing at least one mobile DF Set.

The invention uses an improved technique to collect data from one or multiple DF Sets, and then to intelligently present that data so that overall measurement uncertainties are included as part of the display. Since this unique display presents an intelligent probabilistic location of the transmitter, the odds that an EL System operator will actually

5 locate that transmitter are greatly increased.

In conclusion, insofar as the inventor is aware, no invention formerly developed provides this unique method of probabilistically displaying transmitter locations in emitter location systems.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In light of the aforementioned problems associated with the prior methods and systems, it is an object of the present invention to provide a Direction Finding Method and System Using Probabilistic Mapping. The preferred system should provide a technique for
5 taking in data sets (lines of bearing) from DF receivers and characterizing those signals with their respective probabilities of error. Then using a unique method, the preferred system can display the triangulated position on a map with an overlay of probability fields indicating the emitter location with varying levels of confidence. Even further, the preferred system must be able to redraw the probability fields on the map display in real-
10 time as new data is collected and updated. In this way, a far more efficient EL System can be achieved in which the emitter's position can be determined more quickly. It should be noted that with this invention, triangulation can be done with just a single (mobile) DF Set in the EL System. Today's systems for triangulation must use at least three DF Sets.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The objects and features of the present invention, which are believed to be novel, are set forth with particularity in the appended claims. The present invention, both as to its organization and manner of operation, together with further objects and advantages, may 5 best be understood by reference to the following description, taken in connection with the accompanying drawings, of which:

Figure 1 is a drawing of a conventional triangulation-based EL System;

Figure 2 is an example of what a present day mapping display looks like when using the setup of the system of Figure 1;

10 Figure 3 is a drawing of a preferred embodiment of the present invention and how it is used; and

Figure 4 is an example of how the probability field mapping display of the present invention can be presented to an EL System operator.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The following description is provided to enable any person skilled in the art to make and use the invention and sets forth the best modes contemplated by the inventor of carrying out his invention. Various modifications, however, will remain readily apparent to those skilled in the art, since the generic principles of the present invention have been defined herein specifically to provide a Direction Finding Method and System Using Probabilistic Mapping.

The present invention can best be understood by initial consideration of Figure 10 1. Figure 1 is a drawing of a conventional triangulation-based EL System 11. The system 11 is comprised of several DF Sets 14 which can communicate their line-of-bearing (LOB) measurements to each other. The LOB data from each DF Set is used to triangulate the position of the emitter which is then plotted on a map display for the EL System operator (see FIG. 2 for an example of this plot). This present day method of displaying the emitter 15 location always has uncertainties due to the uncertainties of the LOB measurements themselves.

DF Sets 14 receive RF signals 12 from emitter 10. The DF Sets each independently make LOB measurements 16 and report them to each other over a communications link 18. Each DF Set then has the ability to take the respective LOB 20 measurements and computer the triangulated position 22 of emitter 10. This position is plotted on a standard map display 20.

As mentioned, an emitter location (EL) system is comprised of one or more direction finding (DF) Sets. Each DF Set is comprised of a receiver, a computer, and other devices to evaluate the direction to an emitter, relative to the DF Set's location. These line-of-bearing (LOB) measurements inherently have some level of uncertainty due to 5 several reasons.

The major sources of measurement errors in real-world DF measurements are: (1) uncertainties from the DF antenna array due to frequency dependent variations; and (2) signal reflections, also known as multi-path.

Typically in a DF Set, the device that collects, interprets, and plots the line-of- 10 bearing (LOB) data onto a map is a standard computer device. The LOBs that are displayed will vary from measurement to measurement depending on the aforementioned uncertainties. Most often in the industry today though, the DF Sets simply take the collected LOB data sets and average them to produce a best guess as to the true LOB to the transmitter. But as mentioned, the resulting LOB invariably has some level of error.

15 It should be reiterated and understood that present-day EL Systems contain inherent errors in their measurements, and subsequently display those measurements uncorrected. What is needed therefore in order to enhance the effectiveness, and usefulness of EL Systems is (1) An enhanced technique to collect the LOB data; and (2) The enhanced method of displaying the processed data to operators. These two things are performed by 20 the invention of this provisional patent application.

Figure 2 is an example of what a present day mapping display 20 looks like when using the setup of the system of Figure 1. In this display 20, the positions of the three or

more DF Sets 14A, 14B and 14C, for example, are plotted. The LOB 16 from each DF Set 14 may or may not be plotted. But the triangulated position 22 of the emitter is averaged from the various LOB data and plotted. Again, this position 22 is an averaged position based upon the LOB data, which inherently has a level of error.

5 Figure 3 is a drawing of a preferred embodiment of the present invention and how it is used. In this case, at least one of the DF Sets 14D is mobile. The mobile units are also networked to the other DF Sets (e.g. 14B) and can relay back their LOB data back for triangulation purposes. This time though, the transmitter's position is displayed using the software of this invention. Probability fields are drawn in real-time with the technique
10 described herein. Statistical processing is also performed on the data sets to hone the probability fields. The result is available to the operators at each DF Set location (see FIG. 4 for an example of this plot).

The communications link 18 allows each DF Set 14 to report its line of bearing and quality number data to each other. The quality number is a value provided by the DF
15 receivers themselves that indicates the relative accuracy of any particular LOB measurement. This quality number is used by the method of this invention as shall be seen later.

At least one of the DF sets has to be mobile. Each DF Set has software capable of processing the collective LOB and quality number data with special filtering. The
20 emitter's position with probability fields 28 is then plotted on the improved map display 24 in real time. This position will have greatly reduced uncertainties as opposed to the triangulated position 22 of FIG 2. The technique of this invention provides a much faster

triangulation process as well. It should be further noted that with the method of this invention, you do not need to have multiple DF Sets to triangulate a position, you can use a *single* mobile DF Set to achieve the same results.

Figure 4 is an example of how the probability field mapping display 24 of the
5 present invention can be presented to an EL System operator.

In this display, the positions of the DF Sets 14A and 14D are also plotted. The
LOB's 17A and 17B with error bounds 19A and 19D (calculated with the quality number)
from each DF Set may or may not be plotted. But the probability field overlay map 28 of
where the emitter is most likely located is indeed plotted. The various fields can have
10 different colors representing a probability, or a sigma value that the emitter is located
within that field. Higher probability fields are located in the center, with decreasing
“rings” of probability going outward.

The technique of this invention involves the use of a mobile DF Set in an EL
System. The first step is for a mobile DF Set to take an LOB measurement of emitter 10.
15 This process involves taking the LOB data and the so-called "quality number" reading
from the DF receiver. Modern DF receivers now produce a quality number with every
LOB output. This quality number value is a metric by which the DF receiver manufacturer
estimates the probability that a measurement is accurate. The computer in the DF Set then
takes this quality number along with the actual LOB measurement and stores them in
20 memory for future processing.

The next step is for the mobile DF Set to move its physical position with respect to
the transmitter's position. While moving, the DF Set is constantly taking in more LOB

data and associated quality numbers. This process goes on for as long as required to find the transmitter. The more data that is collected, the higher will be the probability that the triangulated position of the transmitter is where it is expected to be.

This invention employs a specialized recursive method in the computer to process
5 the LOB data that is continually being stored. This specialized method is the topic of another patent application entitled: "Technique and Algorithm for Reducing Measurement Uncertainties in Emitter Location Systems," incorporated herein by reference. The whole process begins after a "cross-over" point is first found. A cross-over point is the intersection between the last best LOB data entry, and the newly arrived LOB. This cross-
10 over point, when fixed on a map, is the original triangulated position (hereafter referred to as the "position point") of the transmitter. These position points are then continually fed into a separate system/process that draws the "probability fields".

The main feature of this invention is the unique way of displaying these probability fields where the emitter is expected to be. The latest position point of the emitter is plotted
15 on top of an area map that the computer also provides. The emitter position on the map is displayed initially as a cone or wedge from the operator's known position towards the transmitter. The cone's angle of dispersion is dependent upon the measurement uncertainty. This visual of the measurement uncertainty is created by the computer which assigns a probability curve over each LOB based on the quality number. The curves can
20 be Gaussian in nature or taken from the antenna calibration tables. The exact probability distribution can be manually chosen by the DF Set operator as well. On the improved map

display drawing of FIG 4, this distribution across the cone is not shown, but the bounds of the error are shown for the LOB 17 measurements.

The resulting display to the DF Set operator is an overlayed area which has colors to indicate higher probability fields where the emitter might be. The color fields can be 5 indicative of one, two, three, or more sigma probability that an emitter lies within that region. Furthermore, the computer can statistically multiply the respective probability curves of each LOB measurement 17 with each other to create an even more accurate overlay. Thus, the emitter 10 can be located within the overlay area within a certain probability of error.

10 The next step in the unique technique of this invention is for the operator to move closer to the center of the area overlay on the map. This will have the affect of making the area overlay smaller and smaller since the LOBs that are constantly taken, will result in position points that are closer and closer together. Thus, the accuracy of the probability fields will increase, and the overlay area of the field on the map display will 15 appear to shrink. As mentioned, the computer displays regions of varying colors indicating the relative probabilities that the emitter is within that area overlay. The colors are configurable to the operator for ease of use.

DIAGRAM REFERENCE NUMERALS

- 10 Emitter / Transmitter
- 20 12 RF signals
- 14 DF Set
- 16 Line-of-bearing (LOB) measurement data

- 17 LOB data with error bounds calculated with the quality numbers
- 18 Communications Link
- 20 Standard Map Display
- 22 Triangulated Position calculated from LOB measurement data
- 5 24 Improved Map Display
- 26 Direction of mobile DF Set movement
- 28 Probability Fields of location of emitter

Those skilled in the art will appreciate that various adaptations and
10 modifications of the just-described preferred embodiment can be configured without
departing from the scope and spirit of the invention. Therefore, it is to be understood that,
within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced other than as
specifically described herein.